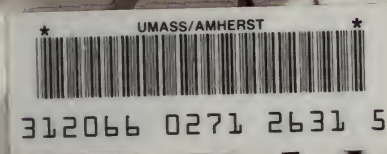


MASS. T3.2:G94

Guide to Retirement Benefits for
Massachusetts State Employees

Massachusetts State Board of Retirement
State Treasurer Shannon P. O'Brien

now is the right *time*
to think about retirement



letter from the State Treasurer



Thinking about your retirement isn't something that should be left until the last minute. It is vitally important that we all begin planning today to ensure a secure and smooth retirement in the years to come.

This brochure is designed to help you understand your eligibility for retirement benefits available from the Commonwealth. I urge you to review this material carefully and weigh the merits of all the benefit options.

My office is here for all the dedicated employees of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to serve as a planning resource for you and your family. Retirement counselors are available for confidential, one-on-one counseling sessions.

If you have any questions or would like to set up an appointment, please contact the State Board of Retirement at **617-367-7770** or **1-800-392-6014**. Our office is open Monday–Friday (8:30 am to 5:00 pm) with experienced counselors ready to assist you in this important process. Please feel free to utilize our walk-in service.

Thank you for your many years of state service.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Shannon P. O'Brien".

Shannon P. O'Brien
Treasurer and Receiver General

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Introduction

The State Board of Retirement administers the Massachusetts State Employees Retirement System for State employees. It is a contributory, defined benefit retirement system governed by Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 32. The system provides retirement, disability, survivor, and death benefits to members and their beneficiaries.

The State Board of Retirement processes and approves retirement applications, ordinary and accidental disability retirements, refunds, and survivor benefits. Additionally, the Board is a resource for State employees seeking information on retirement. The Board is composed of five members and is chaired by State Treasurer Shannon P. O'Brien. The Treasurer appoints the second member. The third and fourth members are elected by the membership of the Retirement System and the fifth member is chosen by the other four members. The fifth member cannot be an employee, a retiree, or an official of the Commonwealth.

As pension benefits grow more complex, retirement planning becomes more crucial. Proper and early planning is the key to ensuring your financial future. By learning about the State's pension plan and educating yourself about investments and savings, you will be on your way to securing a retirement which meets the needs of you and your family. You should become familiar with your eligibility for benefits and understand how it affects you and your family as you plan for the years ahead.

This booklet is intended to provide you with a general outline of retirement benefits offered by the State. It explains eligibility, service, and contribution requirements. Often there are special circumstances concerning retirement and it would be impossible to outline all of the possibilities in this brochure.

You are encouraged to contact the State Board of Retirement at 617-367-7770 or visit for one-on-one counseling.

Early planning is the key to a successful retirement!

Membership

Membership in the system is mandatory for nearly all public employees who are regularly employed on a part-time or full-time permanent basis. If you are regularly employed in the performance of duties for the State you are considered a member-in-service. You remain a member-in-service until you separate from the State by reason of retirement, failure of re-election or re-appointment, resignation or removal or discharge from your position or office that you hold.

Contributions by Members-in-Service

All members-in-service make mandatory pre-tax contributions through payroll deductions. Members contribute a percent of their regular compensation based upon when they joined the system. Law mandates the contribution rate. Below is a list of the rates and dates of membership.

IF YOU JOINED THE SYSTEM:	YOUR CONTRIBUTION RATE:
Prior to January 1, 1975	5%
January 1, 1975 to December 31, 1983	7%
January 1, 1984 to June 30, 1996	8%
July 1, 1996	9%

Exceptions Include:

- employees appointed to the State Police on or after July 1, 1996 contribute 12%.

- if your membership began on or after January 1, 1979, and your annual rate of regular compensation is \$30,000 or more, an additional 2% will be withheld of that portion of your salary that is in excess of \$30,000. This 2% withholding is in addition to the 7%, 8%, 9%, or 12% already being deducted from your regular compensation.

AN EXAMPLE:

You became a member-in-service in 1991 and your regular rate of compensation was \$40,000. Deductions in the amount of 8% of \$40,000 will be taken (totaling \$3,200) and deductions in the amount of 2% of \$10,000 (\$40,000 minus \$30,000) will be taken (totaling \$200). Your annual total contribution of \$3,400 will be deducted from your paycheck.

Creditable Service

As a member-in-service you earn creditable service toward a retirement allowance for the time during which you contributed either 5%, 7%, 8%, 9%, or 12% of your salary to the retirement system.

If you are a full-time employee, you will earn one year of creditable service for each year completed. For those employed on a less than full-time basis, you will earn an amount of service equal to a percentage of the full-time service rate. For example, if you are employed on a half-time basis you will receive 50% or 6-month service for each year completed.

In some instances, you may buyback prior public service to the Commonwealth that was refunded or public service to the Commonwealth that was provided but which did not have retirement contributions withheld.

Additionally, if you took a refund of your retirement contribution, you may buyback service prior to your actual retirement date to have the time credited toward a state retirement.

If you leave state service and withdraw your money, you may buy back the service but not the contribution rate.

Veterans

You may also receive credit for military service if you qualify as a veteran as defined in M.G.L. c. 32, Section 1. If you are a vested member with ten years of creditable service and were honorably discharged from active duty in at least one of the conflicts listed in the following chart, you may be eligible to receive creditable service. However, you must have had at least one day of wartime service during the conflict and your active duty period must have been at least the length of the minimum period of active duty listed below for that conflict.

CONFLICT	DATES	MIN. LENGTH OF ACTIVE DUTY
World War II	Sept. 16, 1940– Dec. 31, 1946	90 days
Korea	June 25, 1950– Jan. 31, 1955	90 days
Korea-Vietnam (interim)	Feb. 1, 1955– Aug. 4, 1964	180 days
Vietnam	Aug. 5, 1964– May 7, 1975	90 days
Lebanon	Aug. 25, 1982– [date to be determined]	90 days

Grenada	Oct. 25, 1983- Dec. 15, 1983	90 days
Panama	Dec. 20, 1989- Jan. 31, 1990	90 days
Persian Gulf	Aug. 2, 1990- [date to be determined]	90 days

In addition, Veteran's status includes those who, instead of performing "wartime service", have been awarded one of the following campaign badges: *Second Nicaraguan Campaign*, *Navy Occupation Service*, *Medal of Humane Action*, *Yangtze Service* or *Army of Occupation*. If you served in wartime and were awarded a *Purple Heart* or service-connected disability, regardless of whether you completed the minimum length of active duty service required in the chart under the first bulleted paragraph above, you qualify for veteran's status.

Veterans who also have Active Reserve or Massachusetts National Guard Service may receive creditable service for such Guard/Reserve service on a ratio of five years of such service to equal one-year of creditable service.

Exception—You should be aware that six months of active duty for training in the Active Reserves and the National Guard does not qualify as active service toward the minimum period listed. Additionally, if your only active duty was active duty training, you are not eligible to purchase credit for your military service. The State Board of Retirement will provide the final determination for you.

Vesting & Eligibility

Being vested means that you are eligible to receive a retirement allowance. You are vested in the State system if you became a member after January 1, 1978, and have at least ten years of service. To be eligible to retire, you need to meet one of the following conditions:

- 20 years of creditable service, or
- attain the age of 55 with ten years of creditable service.

State Police—Group 3

Any member of the State Police who has at least twenty years of creditable service may elect to retire at any age prior to age 55. State Police officers should contact the State Board of Retirement for more information with regard to their retirement benefits.

Retirement Allowance

Your retirement allowance is made up of two parts: an annuity and a pension. The annuity portion is the contributions that are deducted during the course of your employment and deposited for you in an annuity savings fund. The interest that accrues on these contributions is credited to your individual account. The Public Employee Retirement Administration Commission (PERAC) establishes the interest rate, which is credited to your account. The rate, by law, is the average interest rate paid on individual savings accounts, which is obtained from a representative sample of financial institutions in Massachusetts.

The pension is the difference between the retirement allowance specified by law and the amount of your contributions and the retirement system investment earnings. The group classification you are a member of affects your retirement allowance.

The amount of your retirement allowance depends upon the following:

- your age,
- your length of creditable service,
- your highest 36 consecutive months of regular compensation, and
- your group classification.

Group Classifications

Your position, occupation, and the duties you perform determine your group classification. State positions fall within the following groups:

Group One—Members are officials and general employees including clerical, administrative and technical workers, laborers, mechanics, and all others not otherwise classified.

Group Two—Members in this group include certain employees with hazardous occupations, such as ambulance attendants, licensed electricians, and mental health hospital attendants.

Group Three—Members are exclusively State Police officers.

Group Four—Members include public safety officers, officials, and employees, such as police officers, firefighters, and certain correction officers.

Superannuation—Regular Retirement

Superannuation is the term that is used to describe the process of being retired upon reaching a certain age and/or earning a certain amount of creditable service. The superannuation retirement allowance of any member may not exceed 80% of his or her three-year average annual rate of regular compensation. You will be eligible to receive a superannuation retirement allowance once you have earned 20 years of creditable service (at any age), or once you are age 55 and have at least 10 years of creditable service.

Retirement Allowance Options

You have three options to choose from how your retirement benefits will be paid. Review these options carefully and determine which is best for you and your family. You cannot change your option after your retirement date. If upon retirement, you do not select an option, the law provides that you will be retired with Option B.

Your retirement allowance must be paid to you in lifetime monthly payments. The amount of the payments will depend upon your selection. The option you choose will also determine what benefits, if any, will be paid to survivors after your death.

There are no restrictions on an election of an option. All members are free to select one of 3 options: Option A, Option B, or Option C. With your first check you will receive information about direct deposit.

Option A

Option A will provide you with your full retirement allowance in monthly payments as long as you live. However, all allowance payments stop when you die and no benefits are provided to survivors.

If a State employee is married and chooses Option A, his or her spouse is required to sign the Option form consenting to this choice and verifying that they understand the option.

Option B

Option B provides a lifetime allowance to you which is 3% to 10% less per month than Option A.* The annuity portion of your allowance is reduced to allow a benefit for your beneficiary. Upon your death, your surviving beneficiary of record, or if there is no beneficiary living, the person or persons appearing in the judgment of the State Retirement Board to be entitled, will be paid the remaining balance of your accumulated total deductions from your annuity reserve account.

*APPROXIMATE REDUCTION	3%	5%	10%
AGE OF MEMBER	50	60	70

During your retirement, the balance in your annuity savings account decreases by an amount equal to the annuity portion of your pension. In most cases, your annuity savings account will be depleted after 15 years. Upon your death, the balance remaining in your account will be paid in a lump sum to your beneficiary or your estate. If your annuity savings account is depleted while you are receiving your allowance, you will continue to receive your full Option B pension for life; but your beneficiary will not receive any payment upon your death.

More than one person may be designated as your Option B beneficiary and your beneficiaries need not be related to you. You may change your Option B beneficiary at any time.

Option C

Option C, also known as the joint and last survivor allowance, provides you with a lifetime allowance approximately 20% less than that which you would receive under Option A. Upon your death, your designated beneficiary will be paid a monthly allowance for the remainder of his or her life. The survivor benefit will be equal to two-thirds of the allowance, which was being paid to you at the time of your death.

Your monthly allowance received under Option C depends upon life expectancy factors for you and your designated beneficiary. Eligible beneficiaries under Option C include: spouse, parent, unmarried former spouse, sibling, or child.

Special circumstances concerning Option C: If you choose Option C and your beneficiary predeceases you, you cannot name a different "Option C beneficiary." However, under the terms of the "pop up" provision of the Pension Reform Act of 1987, your monthly benefit will "pop up" to the Option A benefit amount that you would have received on the date of your retirement, plus any cost-of-living adjustments. This new, higher amount is then paid to you as of the date of the death of your beneficiary and until you die.

All Option Forms must be witnessed by a spouse if a member is married.

OPTION C ESTIMATE OF BENEFIT

age of member	55	65	65	70	70
beneficiary	55	55	65	65	70
approximate %	83%	70%	78%	71%	76%

Calculating Your Retirement Benefit:

Your benefit rate is determined by your age as of your last birthday and your group classification. The benefit rate is a specific percentage of the amount of your average annual rate of pay. The maximum pension is 80% of the high three-year average annual rate of compensation. Your age factor times the number of years of service determines this percentage.

Example One

A **Group One** member retiring with the following conditions:

Age	55
Years of creditable service	15 1/2
Status	Non-Veteran
High 36 consecutive months of annual rate of regular compensation	\$24,333
Total Annual Allowance	\$5,657.42
Monthly Benefit	\$471.45

Example Two

A **Group Two** member retiring with the following conditions:

Age	55
Years of creditable service	15
Status	Veteran
High 36 consecutive months of annual rate of regular compensation	\$25,000
Total Annual Allowance	\$7,725
Monthly Benefit	\$643.75

As a veteran, this individual is entitled to \$15.00 a year for each of their 15 years of state service. The maximum credit for a veteran is \$300 per year.

Benefit Rate Percentage Chart (Group One)

Age	Factor %	Age	Factor %	Age	Factor %
45	.005	52	.012	59	.019
46	.006	53	.013	60	.020
47	.007	54	.014	61	.021
48	.008	55	.015	62	.022
49	.009	56	.016	63	.023
50	.010	57	.017	64	.024
51	.011	58	.018	65 +	.025

For **Group Two** add 5 years to your age. For **Group Four** add 10 years to your age. Please review eligibility requirements.

Estimate Your Retirement Benefit*

To calculate your benefits just complete the following steps using the following worksheet.

1. Age _____
Use your age on your last birthday. For group 2 add 5 years to your last birthday and consult the **Benefit Rate Percentage Chart** (see page 13). Remember you must be at least 55 years to be classified in Group 2.
2. Years of Creditable Service _____
Enter the number of years you contributed a percentage of your salary to the retirement system.
3. Multiply Line 1 and Line 2 _____
4. Salary Average _____
To figure out your average annual rate of regular compensation, add together your highest 36 consecutive months (at any time during your public career) and divide by three.

To Calculate Your Pension*

1. Enter your age factor from **Benefit Rate Percentage Chart** (see page 13). _____
2. Enter your years of service _____
3. Multiply line 1 and line 2 and enter percent (%) _____
4. Enter your highest 3-year salary average _____
5. Enter the percentage from line 3 _____
6. Multiply line 4 by line 5 and enter amount _____

Option A pension

To calculate an approximate **Option B pension**, reduce your Option A pension by 4% (see chart on page 10).

To calculate an approximate **Option C pension**, reduce your Option A pension by 20% (see chart on page 11).

*These worksheets are designed solely for estimates. Actual pension amounts can only be calculated at time of retirement.

Taxes

The superannuation retirement allowance that you receive from the State is not subject to Massachusetts State Income Taxes. However, the federal government will tax a large portion of your retirement allowance immediately upon retirement.

When you retire, you will be required to complete a W-4P Form to begin a monthly Federal tax withholding. Your tax liability will be determined by using the Internal Revenue Guidelines. Since January 12, 1988, all contributions to the retirement system have been made on a pre-tax basis. Consequently, only your contributions made prior to January 12, 1988 will be tax free. Pre-tax contributions and all of the interest, which your account has earned, will be taxable.

The balance in your annuity savings account (the total of your contributions and interest), may be treated differently, according to the nontaxable and taxable portions:

Nontaxable portion: The nontaxable portion of your balance is equal to your contributions, if any, made prior to January 1, 1988, plus any payments you made to "buy back" previous creditable service. This is also known as your "after-tax" portion because these contributions were deducted from your paycheck after taxes had already been taken out of the entire amount of your paycheck. Because you have already paid taxes on this portion (as well as any payments you made to purchase creditable service), you will not have to pay taxes on this amount again.

Taxable portion: The taxable portion of your balance is equal to your contributions made on or after January 1, 1988, plus any interest you receive on your account.

After January 1, 1988, all contributions were deducted from your paycheck before taxes were taken out. Since you have not yet paid taxes on this portion, it is taxable when you receive it in the form of a lump-sum payment or, if you roll over this portion to an IRA or another qualified employer retirement plan, when you eventually receive these funds.

Each year the Retirement Board will send a 1099R form containing the following information:

- Gross Amount Received
- Taxable Amount
- Federal Tax Withheld (if any)
- Health Insurance Deduction

Section 10

If your position is eliminated, abolished or if you are laid off or terminated you may qualify for a for a Section 10 allowance provided you have at least 20 years of service and meet other requirements. Please contact the State Board of Retirement for more information.

Social Security

Anyone retiring from State service and receiving governmental pensions who also are eligible for Social Security benefits may have their Social Security benefits offset in a variety of circumstances. Social Security will contact the Retirement Board and request the date the individual was first eligible to retire. A person eligible to retire prior to January 1, 1986, will not have their Social Security benefit reduced. Retirees attempting to collect Social Security on a spouse's earnings can do so if they were eligible to retire prior to December 1, 1982. In addition,

there are other factors involved regarding your Social Security benefit when you receive a State pension. Benefits vary according to these factors. It is recommended that you contact your local Social Security Office for detailed information.

Health Insurance

Retirees are eligible upon retirement to retain their health insurance coverage at a group rate. For more information, please contact the Group Insurance Commission.

Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA)

You will be eligible for a COLA on July 1st of the second fiscal year following the year in which your retirement benefit first took effect.

Limitation on Employment in a Governmental Job

There are limitations that apply to retirees in positions in local as well as state government. Limitations include:

- employment may not exceed 960 hours; and/or
- total earnings cannot exceed the difference between the retirement allowance and the current salary of the position from which you retired.

As a retiree, you must cease employment whenever either one of the above two conditions are met. If you wish to continue working, then you must waive your retirement allowance.

Your Beneficiaries and Survivors

Once you begin to receive retirement benefits, you should advise your beneficiaries and survivors as to the procedures to follow upon your death. They should be instructed to notify the State Board of Retirement of your death and furnish the Board with a death certificate. Once the Survivor Benefits Department has received the death certificate, the instructions that you made when you chose a retirement option will be carried out.

Change of Address

Please be sure to notify the State Board of Retirement in writing regarding any change of address.

Frequently Asked Questions

? Can I borrow money from my retirement account now and pay it back later?

No! Under state law, your retirement account has no provisions for withdrawal under any circumstance, including mortgage down payment or college education.

? Each time I receive my paycheck, I notice it shows a deduction for retirement. What happens to these deductions?

Active state employees contribute a percentage of their gross salary toward retirement (the percentage depends on their date of entry into service). The State Board of Retirement establishes and maintains a retirement account which represents both:

- contributions deducted from your paycheck by your payroll, and
- regular interest earned on your prior year's ending balance. This is the artificial interest rate set by PERAC.

? Why do I pay a higher percentage toward my retirement than some other employees?

Contribution to the state retirement system is determined by your most recent entry into the system (see contribution rates on page 3). Members who re-enter the system with funds on deposit or who transfer from another contributory retirement system maintain their former contribution level.

? Who invests my money?

Your contributions are pooled with those of other active members and are invested in the Pension Reserves Investment

Trust (PRIT). PRIT is a pooled investment fund that invests the pension reserve assets of the Employees' and State Teachers' Retirement Systems. The nine member Pension Reserve Investment Management (PRIM) Board, chaired by State Treasurer Shannon P. O'Brien, manages it.

? When can I file for retirement?

No sooner than 120 days before you plan to retire. If you file after sixty days after your retirement, your benefits will not be retroactive to your retirement date. The State Retirement Board strongly recommends that you plan your retirement and that you file at least 30 days in advance of leaving your job. Certain retirement options will not be available to you once you stop working. You should therefore obtain counseling from the State Retirement Board before you stop working.

? How many forms must I file to begin the retirement process?

There are only two forms to begin the retirement process: **Application by Member for Voluntary Retirement Allowance** and **Option Form**. These may be obtained by contacting the State Retirement Board when you begin to think about retirement.

? What does "vested" mean?

Vesting is a term commonly used to signify the right to a retirement allowance at a later date. Vested benefits are those benefits that a member is entitled to today, not based on additional service.

? What if I leave state service after I am vested but before I am old enough to retire?

If you leave state service after you are vested, you may leave your retirement contributions in the system and receive a state pension at age 55.

? What if I leave state service before I am vested?

If you leave state service before you are vested, there are options available to you. You may receive a refund of your retirement contributions, with 20% deducted for federal taxes. Alternatively, you can have it “rolled over” into a tax-qualified IRA. Under certain circumstances, there may be a penalty for early withdrawal.

? How do I qualify for a refund?

You may also receive a refund of your contributions upon the conclusion of your employment if you are under age 55 regardless of length of service or if you are over 55 but have less than ten years of service.

? Do I get any interest on my refund?

By law, if you voluntarily leave employment that began after January 1, 1984 and have less than 5 years of service, no interest will be refunded to you. If you have served between five and ten years, you will receive half the interest credited to your account. If you have over ten years of service, all of the interest will be refunded to you. Also, if you are removed or discharged, you will receive interest regardless of the years of service.

Glossary of Terms

Annuity—The contributions that are deducted during the course of your creditable service are deposited for you in an annuity savings fund by the State Board of Retirement. The interest that accrues on these contributions is credited to your individual account. That part of your retirement allowance that is based on the total amount in your annuity savings account on the date of your retirement is the annuity.

Annuity Saving Account—The State Board of Retirement establishes an annuity savings account for each member of the system. Your account consists of two parts—your contributions and interest. Your contributions are deducted from your paycheck. The interest is earned on the prior year's ending balance. The interest rate is determined by PERAC.

Creditable Service—You earn creditable service while you are working for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and contributing a percentage of your salary to the retirement system.

Member-in-Service—Any member who is regularly employed by the Commonwealth and is making contributions to the system. You are a member-in-service until you separate from the State by reason of retirement, failure of re-election or re-appointment, resignation or removal or discharge from your position or office that you hold.

Pension—A pension is the difference between the retirement allowance specified by law and the amount provided by employee contributions and retirement system investment earnings.

Retirement Allowance—A retirement allowance is the lifetime benefit that you receive, the amount depending upon the Option you choose, that is paid by the state. Your Retirement Allowance is made up of two parts: an annuity and a pension

Superannuation—This term is used for a regular retirement allowance. You will be eligible to receive a regular retirement allowance once you have earned 20 years of creditable service (at any age), or once you are age 55 and have at least 10 years of creditable service. Chapter 32 of the Massachusetts General Laws regulates your retirement allowance and allows you to choose one of three benefit options. These options differ with regard to the amount paid and whether any benefits will be paid to someone else after your death.

Vested—Being vested means that you fulfilled the criteria to receive a retirement allowance and are eligible to receive a lifetime retirement allowance from the State.

State Board of Retirement

One Ashburton Place, 12th Floor, Room 219

Boston, MA 02108

Telephone: 617-367-7770, 1-800-392-6014

Fax: 617-723-1438

www.state.ma.us/treasury/srb.htm

Public Employee Retirement Administration Commission

5 Middlesex Avenue, 3rd Floor

Somerville, MA 02145

617-666-4446

www.state.ma.us/perac

Group Insurance Commission

19 Staniford Street, 4th Floor

Boston, MA 02114

617-727-2310

www.state.ma.us/gic

Pension Reserves Investment Management Board

125 Summer Street, 10th Floor

Boston, MA 02110

617-946-8415

Executive Office for Elder Affairs

One Ashburton Place, 5th Floor

Boston, MA 02108

617-727-7750

Social Security Administration

1-800-772-1213

Internal Revenue Service Tax Payer Assistance

1-800-829-1040

